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SUBJECT: IDPS INSECURE AND HUNGRY IN NORTH AND CENTRAL
KATANGA

¶1. Summary: As part of UNHCR's Country Operations 2007 planning session for donors, a field mission to Katanga province was conducted March 14-16. This trip gave donors an opportunity to view firsthand the current state of affairs, infrastructure, political climate and security concerns. The delegation met with returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in remote areas of northern and central Katanga, UNHCR and other UN agencies in Lubumbashi and Kalemie and international NGO partners in Lubumbashi, Kalemie and Mitwaba. The most important need voiced by all: security, security, and security. End summary.

Delegation and Mission

¶2. The delegation was led by UNHCR Representative Eusebe Hounsokou and consisted of representatives from the foreign ministries of Canada and Norway, representatives from USAID, ECHO, and DFID, and representatives from the Swedish and U.S. Missions in Kinshasa. The mission was to observe conditions and assess humanitarian and protection needs in central and northern Katanga. The team visited Kalemie, Mitwaba and Lubumbashi. Current estimates indicate a total of up to 1.7 million IDPs in the DRC. The small area near Mitwaba has only recently been surveyed by Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) and UNHCR, which have reported more than 30,000 IDPs in 10 camps. The delegation concentrated on the following: a) security issues; b) logistical and infrastructure difficulties; and c) issues of food, housing, education and health for returnees and IDPs.

Security in North and Central Katanga

¶3. While fragile peace is slowly returning to many parts of the Eastern DRC, many areas in northern and central Katanga province are not secure. Ongoing efforts in South Kivu to subdue militias have pushed some armed groups into northern and central Katanga, where there is no MONUC presence. The Katanga region is also home to Mai Mai groups, including fighters led by the infamous Gedeon. Further complicating the mix are large numbers of FARDC of the 63rd Brigade who have been billeted in Katanga for the last nine years. As with most FARDC troops, there is little material support, and there are numerous reports of predation upon civilians. Lootings, beatings, rapes and killings across the territory are attributed to unspecified "men in uniform" as well as to the Mai Mai militias. A proposed fourth brigade of UN peacekeepers for Katanga was shelved, but a long-awaited detachment of

peacekeepers from Benin is expected soon in Katanga.

Logistics and Infrastructure Deficit

¶4. Although Katanga once had a notable road and railway system, infrastructure has been degraded or destroyed by long-term conflict and neglect. In an attempt to alleviate some of the severe hunger, the World Food Program recently sent a truck convoy from Lubumbashi to Mitwaba, a distance of 250 miles. The convoy took 3 weeks to complete the journey. The only alternative to ground transportation, however, is expensive airlifts. Although a vestige of rail service between Lubumbashi and Kalemie still exists, the rail-bed, engines and carriages are falling apart and transit often takes weeks because of breakdowns. When the trains do run, mining interests that can afford much higher tariffs than humanitarian organizations dominate usage. All UN agencies and NGOs attempting to provide services in the province cite lack of infrastructure and logistical difficulties -- second to security issues -- as the major challenges to providing humanitarian aid.

Food, Housing, Education and Health

¶5. Spontaneous returnees from Tanzanian refugee camps and displaced persons in rural areas of Katanga lack access to food, housing materials, education and health care. Unemployment is very high and there is little economic development. Even international and non-governmental organizations are largely unable to provide basic services in many rural areas. Many returnees and IDPs said that absent security, they fear for their safety whenever they receive food, water and relief supplies, which make them targets for criminal groups.

¶6. Comment: The humanitarian challenges in northern and central Katanga are daunting. As noted in the International Crisis Group's recent report on Katanga, the genesis of the current situation is complex and multi-layered, and resolution defies simplistic, formulaic responses. The planned deployment of peacekeepers in the area, along with an increased GDRC commitment to integration, training and material support for FARDC forces, would ease conditions somewhat for those Congolese displaced by the long-running regional tensions. However, an improvement of the grim reality on the ground will only come with increased security. End comment.

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